

WE CLAIM:

- ✓ 1. A method of vending fasteners to retail consumers, comprising the steps of:
 - (a) stocking numerous varieties of fasteners at a retail outlet in selected locations, each of said locations identifiable by visible retail location identifiers;
 - (b) providing consumers with access to a computer programmed with merchandising software, said software having a user interface for receiving user input and for displaying icons describing said fasteners and also for displaying the retail location identifiers corresponding to the locations in which said fasteners are stocked; and
 - (c) allowing such consumers public access to said fasteners.
- ✓ 2. The method of claim 1, wherein said fasteners are stocked in predetermined containers, readily identifiable by visible container identifiers, and wherein said container identifiers are displayed on said user interface.
- ✓ 3. The method of claim 1, wherein said icons include graphical images of said fasteners.
- ✓ 4. The method of claim 3, wherein said icons, information, and retail location identifiers and container identifiers are presented on pages organized according to fastener varieties, and wherein said user input determines the display of said pages.
- ✓ 5. The method of claim 4, wherein said user interface includes a screen for displaying videos demonstrating the use of at least some of said fasteners.
- ✓ 6. The method of claims 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein step (b) is carried out at said retail outlet, and wherein said user interface includes a touch screen.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein step (b) is carried out remote from said retail outlet, and wherein said user interface includes personal computer and monitor.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein said software is provided to said consumers on a pre-recorded storage medium.

9. The method of claim 7, wherein said software is provided to said consumers by means of a computer network.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein said software comprises a series of pages capable of being displayed by a network browser.

✓ 11. A system for selecting a fastener comprising:

- (a) a computer having a user interface for displaying information and for receiving user input;
- (b) a collection of pages capable of being displayed on said user interface, said pages including one or more selection pages and one or more detail pages, wherein some of said selection pages include icons for selecting one or more types of fasteners, and wherein each said detail page includes information describing a selected type of fastener; and
- (c) display software for controlling the display of said pages on said user interface, in response to said user input.

✓ 12. The system of claim 11 wherein said information on includes the location of said selected type of fastener in a retail establishment.

✓ 13. The system of claim 12 wherein said information includes stock information relating to the availability of said selected type of fastener in said retail establishment.

14. The system of claim 11 wherein said information includes the location of said selected type of fastener in two or more retail establishments.

15. The system of claim 11 wherein some of said detail pages include a link for displaying real-time information relating to the availability of the associated selected type of fastener.

16. The system of claim 11 wherein said information includes graphical instructions describing appropriate usage of said selected type of fastener.

17. The system of claim 11 wherein said information includes a video demonstrating usage of said selected type of fastener.

18. A method of selecting a fastener suitable for a particular purpose from a collection of numerous varieties of fasteners comprising:

- (a) identifying an application in which a fastener may be used;
- (b) accessing a collection of pages by using a computer, the collection of pages describing various types of fasteners;
- (c) navigating through the collection of pages to identify a particular fastener suitable for the application; and
- (d) choosing an appropriate fastener therefrom.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein step (c) is performed by:

- (i) accessing an overview main page of said collection of pages, wherein said overview main page illustrates two or more types or groups of fasteners;
- (ii) selecting a type or group of fastener suitable for the application;
- (iii) viewing another page of said collection of pages, wherein said other page illustrates additional fasteners within said type or group of fasteners;
- (iv) repeating steps (ii) and (iii) one or more times; and

20. The method of claim 19 wherein said detail page includes information relating to the location of said particular fastener in a retail establishment.

21. The method of claim 19 wherein said detail page includes information relating to the availability of said particular fastener in a retail establishment.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein said information includes real-time stock information about said particular fastener in one or more retail establishments.

23. The method of claim 20 wherein steps (b) and (c) are performed in the retail establishment.

24. The method of claim 20 wherein step (b) and (c) are performed in a location remote from said retail establishment.

25. The method of claim 24 further including the following step:
(e) attending at the location of the particular fastener, obtaining one or more of the particular fastener and purchasing the obtained fasteners.

26. The method of claim 24 wherein steps (b) and (c) are performed using a network browser.

27. A method of locating a particular fastener substantially similar to a sample fastener comprising:
(a) accessing a collection of pages by using a computer, the collection of pages describing various types of fasteners;
(b) navigating through the collection of pages and selecting a type of fastener;

- (c) repeating step (b) one or more times and progressively selecting a type of fastener more closely resembling the sample fastener; and
- (c) selecting the particular fastener.

5 28. The method of claim 27 wherein step (b) is performed by

- (i) comparing a characteristic of the sample fastener with a fastener displayed on a page;
- (ii) selecting the next page to be displayed based on the results of the comparison in step (i); and
- 10 (iii) selecting the particular fastener when displayed fastener most closely resembles the sample fastener.

29. The method of claim 28 wherein the following steps are performed before step (ii):

- 15 (iv) comparing a second characteristic of the sample fastener with a fastener displayed on a page; and
- (v) selecting the next page to be displayed based on the the result of the comparison in step (iv).

20 30. A computer readable medium containing a collection of pages capable of being displayed on a user interface device, said pages including one or more selection pages for selecting a type of fastener from two or more types of fasteners and including one or more detail pages for describing selected types of fasteners, wherein said pages are organized in a tree structure having a selection page at its
25 root node.

31. The computer readable medium of claim 30 wherein each of said selection pages includes one or more icons, each of said icons being associated with one or more associated pages, wherein said associated pages may be selection pages or
30 detail pages.

32. The computer readable medium of claim 30 wherein at least some of detail pages contain information relating to one type of fastener.

33. The computer readable medium of claim 32 wherein each of said detail pages includes a description of the location of said type of fastener in a retail establishment.

34. The computer readable medium of claim 33 wherein said location is publicly accessible.

35. The computer readable medium of claim 32, wherein said information includes the availability of said type of fastener in one or more retail establishments.

36. The computer readable medium of claim C35, wherein at least some of said detail page include a link for displaying real time stock information for said type of fastener, wherein said real time stock information is located in a database.

37. The computer readable medium of claim 36 wherein said database is stored on a remote data medium.